EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL MIGRATION AND HOME AFFAIRS

Directorate B : Migration and Mobility
Unit B.3. Information Systems for Borders and Security

High Level Expert Group on Information Systems and Interoperability
First meeting – 20 June 2016
Report

Presentation

Matthias Ruete, chair of the High Level Expert Group on Information Systems and Interoperability (HLEG), highlighted the importance of improved cooperation in the area of information exchange and interoperability of databases and explained the background and context of the HLEG (i.e. the Commission's Communication on Stronger and Smarter Information Systems for Borders and Security of 6 April 2016 ('the Communication') and the roadmap on information exchange and interoperability endorsed by the JHA Council of 10 June 2016 ('the Roadmap')).

COM presented the Communication and its main axes (reinforcement of existing systems, development of new systems, making systems and databases more connected and interoperable). COM recalled the main challenges which will drive the HLEG work. COM also stressed the need for Member States to fully implement and use the Prüm framework, highlighted the ongoing work on the Uniform Message Format (UMF) project and the importance of ensuring that the relevant data protection safeguards are put in place when developing new information systems.

PRES presented the Roadmap and its call to prioritize interoperability initiatives and reference to the HLEG to study and develop them. PRES underlined the joint responsibility of Commission and Member States to implement these actions. It asked COM for regular updates and reports from the HLEG to the JHA Council. In reply, the chair confirmed COM's intention to provide feedback to Council and the European Parliament if and when so requested. He also clarified that the HLEG will work under the auspices of COM to allow for informal discussions, and to overcome the silo approach that sometimes stands in the way of progress in this area.

The Counter-Terrorism Coordinator (CTC) pointed out the importance of defining the basic elements and to provide for a common understanding of the underlying concepts. CTC invited the HLEG to seek input from different external stakeholders with relevant expertise and background in the area of information exchange, including third countries and private stakeholders.

The main challenges of the High Level Expert Group

The members of the HLEG agreed to exploit the existing information sharing environment, and build upon it after having identified the gaps.

Existing systems: implementation and reinforcement

Concerning the improvement, implementation and use of existing systems, members of the HLEG highlighted:

- the need to explore the role of new technology to strengthen existing systems (e.g. use of mobile devices) from an end-user perspective,
- the need for a stronger focus on data quality of the systems (e.g. SIS),
- the need for an Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) to be developed for the SIS,
- the problems in the implementation of Prüm,
- the importance of a decentralized use of SIENA,
- the need to revise ECRIS to foresee its use for other purposes and end-users,
- the need to extend PNR and API to intra-EU flights,
- the need to explore and promote synergies between the Europol Information System and other systems such as the SIS,
- the difficulties for using Eurodac and VIS for law enforcement purposes,
- the need to consider granting access to intelligence/security services to information systems such as SIS or the proposed EES,
- the need to ensure continuous control of the data stored in the information systems by the data owner and to improve the current audit trail of who is accessing which information,
- the need to analyse the potential access to meta data (statistics),
- the need to ensure the necessary financial and personal resources.

The chair advised to concentrate first on issues which are in principle less complex to solve, but have a large impact on result, such as data quality and SIS-AFIS.

Data gaps and the need to develop new systems

Concerning the possible development of new systems and the identification of information gaps the members of the HLEG highlighted:

- the need to address the existing information gap concerning EU citizens and third-country nationals holding a residence cards/permits or a long-term stay visa,
- the need to have the current COM proposals (EES, amendment to SBC) adopted and implemented as a matter of utmost priority,
- the need to identify potential information gaps from a user level perspective (e.g. border guards, police officers),
- the risk that new or revised systems will continue to create new silos (such as ECRIS),
- the requirement to also focus on objects, hence, to establish synergies with the systems used by the customs.

Interoperability/interconnection of information systems

Concerning interoperability, members of the HLEG proposed to have a common reflection and brainstorm on the concepts of 'interoperability/interconnection' in the context of the HLEG in order to exchange different views. As general remark, the members of the HLEG highlighted the need for common standards and hence to further engage in ongoing work towards a global Uniform Message Format (UMF) for all relevant information systems.

Concerning the creation of an **EU Single Search Interface (SSI)** members of the HLEG highlighted:

- their strong support to a SSI (a feasible first step),
- that SSI should not only be used for centralized systems but also for decentralized systems,

- the need to exchange existing knowledge and practices, as several Member States already use national SSI solutions in a border guards and/or police environment.

Concerning the establishment of a shared **biometric matching service (BMS)** in support of various information systems members of the HLEG highlighted:

- the importance of enrolling and storing high-quality biometrics (an area that requires further development) as a basic conditions for any BMS initiative,
- the need to allow the use of biometric data in the context of crime scenes,
- the need to analyse the necessity and technical feasibility of a BMS,
- the significant costs of operating these systems nationally (in a decentralized fashion),
- the need to identify the required data protection safeguards.

Concerning the creation of a **common repository of data** for different information systems members of the HLEG highlighted:

- an interest to explore the possibility of working towards a single, modular identity management database, in line with the principles of data protection by design,
- the need to analyse the legal, technical, operational and financial implications of the possible development of such a common repository of data,
- the exposure to being the target of hackers attacks and the strong need for safeguards and protection,
- the need to explore implications in terms of access rights and retention periods for the different sets of data records that would be stored in such an architecture.

Next steps

The chair presented the HLEG (standard) rules of procedure and proposed their adoption by silence procedure (deadline 27 June 2016 cob).

The chair announced the work planning of the HLEG. In addition to the meeting of 20 June, four more meeting of the HLEG are planned. The provisional planning of these meetings is as follows:

- 20 September 2016: focusing on existing systems, both on the aspect of implementation and reinforcement.
- 29 November 2016: focusing on data gaps and the need to develop new systems.
- February 2017: focusing on the challenge of making systems more interoperable including possibly through the establishment of a common repository of data
- May 2017: drawing conclusions on each of the four items discussed.

The chair announced the setting up of three dedicated subgroups on the subject of Existing Systems, New Systems and Interoperability respectively. These groups will allow for a deeper discussion in more restricted format (maximum 10 Member States' experts per subgroup, complemented with experts from Agencies, CTC and Commission). Members of the HLEG were invited to nominate experts. Participants in these groups will be selected on the basis of proven expertise and experience. The subgroups will receive input from the HLEG and will report back to the HLEG.

The first meeting of the subgroup on Existing Systems will take place in the week of 18 July. The other two subgroups will have their first meeting in September.